2-1-2003

Blasphemy: Impious Speech in the West from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century, by Alain Cabantous

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Published Citation

Behre, Patricia. "Blasphemy: Impious Speech in the West from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century, by Alain Cabantous." *American Historical Review* 108.1 (Feb 2003): 246-247.

general audience rather than as a textbook aimed chiefly at students. Its purpose is to give an overview of an important part of European history rather than to provide a reference work containing all the "standard" names, dates, and facts. As a result, some of its intended readers might find themselves a little lost; as a compromise, therefore, Rossi does occasionally include basic information on the first introduction of a significant figure.

The overall historiographical stance is one that stresses contingency in the historical development of science. The importance of this move remains considerable, even though classic historicism finds few champions these days. In writing the history of science, the temptation to lapse into a teleological tale is great, and an explicit stress of the kind provided by Rossi on the place of contingency—or, as he puts it, "choice"—in the development of scientific knowledge is of salutary value in a book aimed at a nonspecialist readership. Another guiding theme, which is less prominent after its initial introduction than it could have been, is what might be called "social role": Rossi notes that the period under discussion sees the addition of "the mechanic, the natural philosopher, and the virtuoso" to the previously established characters of the humanist, the courtier, the soldier, the priest, and so on (p. 22).

The book is divided into seventeen fairly brief chapters, each of which deals with a distinct topic, such as "Secrets," "Engineers," "Chemical Philosophy," "Descartes," and "Classification." The disadvantage of this format is that there is little sense of chronology; each of these distinct topics sweeps over the entire period of two centuries, with a necessary weakening of integration between them. The temporal structure of the work as a whole is therefore given primarily by the sequencing of the chapters dealing with individuals, and to some extent by the order of presentation of chapters the content of which is primarily sixteenth-century ("Secrets") or seventeenth-century ("Academies").

The narratives given in the chapters themselves are representative of a well-established historiography of the period, perhaps reflecting the emphasis in the bibliography on secondary literature from the 1960s and 1970s; the material cited from the 1980s and 1990s is by contrast relatively sparse, despite the enormous amount of work on the Scientific Revolution published in that period. The style of discussion tends to shy away from the more contextualist approaches that have become popular in recent years, with, for example, references to William Harvey's work on the "oxygenation" of the blood (p. 160), or Isaac Newton's discussion of the "polarization" of light (p. 216), phenomena that would now seldom be characterized by those strictly anachronistic labels. Similarly, the discussion of chemistry and alchemy observes: "Modern chemists do not descend from a long line of great and noble scientists dating to Antiquity and the Renaissance. There is no figure like a Euclid, Archimedes, or Ptolemy in the history of chemistry" (p. 139). One wonders, again, whether the translation may be at fault, removing signs of irony that may have been present in the original.

The shortcomings of this volume obtrude all too often. It is still possible, nonetheless, to find signs of Rossi's own powerful contributions to our understanding of the period and its issues, as in his discussion of the upgrading of craft knowledge in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, or in his discussion of "Time and Nature," as well as of universal languages. This is a book written by a scholar with a powerful vision of his subject, developed over decades of thought and research. It is unfortunate that the account published conveys only an echo of its author's capacities.

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ALAIN CABANTOUS. *Blasphemy: Impious Speech in the West from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by ERIC RAUTH. (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism.) New York: Columbia University Press. 2002. Pp. x, 288. $29.50.

One is tempted, in reviewing a book on blasphemy, to offer one's own impious opening, such as the *aperçu* that, given sufficient time in the company of sailors, even an academic can learn to curse. And so Alain Cabantous, whose earlier work has notably chronicled seamen and navies, has logically moved on to consider this very specific sort of cursing. His work represents a significant contribution to the understanding of impious speech as a reflection of more general shifts in European thought and culture. This new, often deft, English translation by Eric Rauth will prove useful to scholars in a variety of fields.

The only weakness here (and admittedly this may reflect the reviewer's puerile interests more than a true flaw in the monograph) is a paucity of actual blasphemy in favor of a thorough consideration of how institutions perceived and dealt with the crime. The slight variation between the French title of Cabantous's original work, *Histoire du blasphème en Occident: Fin XVIe–milieu XIXe siècle* (1998), and the English title of this translation is actually significant. And while one can hardly blame the American publishers for choosing the punchier title, the French version is in fact more accurate. This work traces, quite ably and often with wit and verve, the history of the crime of blasphemy. The spotlight, therefore, is not on the blasphemers or their imprecations (although they appear from time to time throughout) but on the authorities who deplore them. This is an evening with the gentlemen of the consistory—be it Catholic, Protestant, royal, or revolutionary—not with the errant and motley parishioners whooping it up, incarcerated in the basement.

Cabantous begins by examining how church and civil

authorities defined blasphemy before his specific period, how and when they prosecuted it, and how they at least sought to punish it. He then traces how these issues changed in the course of two and a half centuries, leaving a much-diminished role for blasphemy in the pantheon of high crimes. Along the way, he shows how blasphemy laws and prosecutions both reflected tensions in European society and produced new power relationships, especially between church and royal (secular) courts and officials. The last section of the book considers the influence of revolutionary and postrevolutionary thought on perceptions of this crime. Examples are drawn from France, Italy, Spain, England, and the Holy Roman Empire, with a concentration of French examples indicating the author's particular expertise.

From its original status as an offense of the utmost gravity—profanation of the name or abilities of God, which threatened to bring divine vengeance down on the entire community—blasphemy became more complicated. Or rather, authorities gradually came to consider it in a more complicated (and thus less thoroughly recriminatory) way. Cabantous writes of the gradual "decriminalization of blasphemy throughout Europe" (p. 148), beginning in the seventeenth century, and the process, while not seamless or welcome by all authorities, generally continued. According to the author, "the eighteenth century 'desacralized' the sin by taking up in detail blasphemy's extenuating circumstances, by asking itself about its variations of meaning, by limiting the coercive interventions of the state relating to its perpetrations" (p. 149).

Space does not allow the reviewer to do justice to this sophisticated work. But several of Cabantous's more interesting findings are worth mentioning. He observes that even in its earlier, more threatening manifestation, blasphemy always provoked concern from authorities because of its potential to incite more general disorder, either of a civil (riot or political sedition) or of a religious nature (heresy). Later in this period, this became even more true, as the crime was prosecuted primarily in connection with other disorderly behavior. In this, Cabantous echoes the findings of scholars of witchcraft accusations, in which, despite authorities' efforts to portray witchcraft as the result of a pact with the devil, actual prosecutions usually resulted only when *maleficium* (the doing of harm to one's neighbors) was also present.

Cabantous finds that blasphemy was largely a male affair, especially of young men, often cited among sailors, soldiers, gamblers, and tavern denizens. The preponderance of antiblasphemy laws directed against sailors, he finds, reflects less a greater propensity to blaspheme among these young men than the concern early in the period of the communal harm that would come to an entire ship's company through God's vengeance against individual sins. Ships were dangerous enough places without courting divine wrath. As Europeans (and European authorities) became less convinced of the likelihood of God's immediate retribution (in part through Enlightenment rationalism), they became less concerned about blasphemous speech.

This work will prove useful to scholars across a wide array of fields, including legal history, the history of free speech, the under-considered history of atheism and unbelief, witchcraft, and general "outsider" history. The tension between church and state authority in this pivotal period is particularly well treated. If Christopher Hill's exuberant Ranters, or Carlo Ginzburg's deliciously defiant Menocchio, make only cameo appearances here, one can only say "Zounds" and read on.

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NEIL MACMASTER. *Racism in Europe 1870–2000.* (European Culture and Society.) New York: Palgrave. 2001. Pp. viii, 248. Cloth $69.95, paper $19.95.

Neil MacMaster's narrative of modern racism in Europe investigates the parallel roles of anti-Semitism and anti-black racism as the two dominant forms of prejudice in Europe after 1870. In doing this, MacMaster implicitly follows in the footsteps of Hannah Arendt (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951]), who viewed the two, together with imperialism, as the foundation of European violence and hate. In the first two parts, MacMaster presents a shorter version than Arendt's of the story of racism up to World War II. In the final section, the book deals with the postwar years up to the present, including the rise of the new racism, populism and anti-immigration sentiment at the turn of the millennium.

In general this is a readable book that covers many of the highlights of writings on race as well as major issues of the period. I would like to have seen a more nuanced treatment of some of the historical material; in particular, a focus should be paid to the internal contradictions in ideologies and political developments. For example, one would not know from the book that the category "Social Darwinism" was not a self-designated label but rather a historical critique that included many contradictory views. In addition, I for one was surprised to read that there was a correlation between neo-Lamarckian eugenic policies and Progressive eugenics (p. 52). Before World War II (or after), one would be hard pressed to find correlation between an individual's science and racial politics.

The last part of the book deals with the transformation of racism to include anti-immigration and anti-refugee policies. MacMaster places the responsibility for racism on many parties and individuals. It seems that everyone is implicated. One may ask whether there are (or were) individuals or groups that are more responsible than others for racism. It is no doubt valuable to explore the various manifestations of racism, including the rise of anti-immigration policies and restrictions on refugees in the last generation, as well